



Step Ahead Overview



Step Ahead Mission

A COORDINATED EFFORT THAT ALLOWS CHILDREN AND FAMILIES THE OPPORTUNITY TO REACH THEIR FULL POTENTIAL

This will be accomplished by providing a comprehensive seamless service delivery system for children and families in the State of Indiana, ensuring accessibility, affordability, and quality through state and local planning. Step Ahead shall develop and/or use incentives and resources to support collaborative service networks that will increase efficiency, diminish redundancy and eliminate gaps in service.

Step Ahead Panel Key Principles:

- ◆ Family centered: The family is a very important influence in a child's life. Involve families in the development, implementation, and evaluation of the service system. Respect families by acknowledging that they are the key individuals in a child's life.
- ◆ Systems engage person to person: Respect the individual needs of families. Decision-making is strengthened when it draws upon the experiences of people who are directly affected.
- ◆ Seamless coordination of services: Offer services that are coordinated and uninterrupted, regardless of the funding sources, to assure a smooth transition.
- ◆ Array of choices: Offer services from multiple providers who have capacity to provide choices that address the diverse and interrelated needs of individuals and families.
- ◆ Accessible, affordable, & available: Offer services to individuals and families that may be obtained with minimal effort. Make services community or neighborhood based with flexible hours, cost efficient, and with the capacity to accommodate the needs of the community.



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- ◆ **Quality & outcome driven:** Develop accountability systems that focus on the impact of services and child and family outcomes that measure improvement in the lives of individuals served.
- ◆ **Comprehensive & inclusive:** Offer services that are wide in scope, culturally sensitive and open to all.

Outcomes of Step Ahead

Because Step Ahead is a process rather than a program it is difficult to describe a specific anticipated outcome. Typical state programs identify quantifiable outcomes, which allow for a clear starting and ending point. Step Ahead bases its functions on the strength of a local planning process, which often makes measuring outcomes difficult. Based on its mission, Step Ahead will achieve its ultimate goal when children and families have reached their full potential.

Part of the role of the Step Ahead Office (located in the Office of Community Planning) is to help focus the mission of the planning process at the local level. Because the mission is so broad, general categories were established to help focus the development of local action plans. These categories guide the action plans Step Ahead Councils write in their efforts for children and families reaching their full potential.

The categories and a brief objective statement of each follow:

Basic Health Needs

Indiana families live in a safe domestic and public environment, have full access to adequate food, clothing and shelter and have the opportunity to live physically and emotionally healthy lives. (example: nutrition, dental care, infant mortality, transportation etc.)



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Community Mobilization

Indiana families receive the best efforts of local volunteers and partners that build leverage and resources in their efforts to plan around human services for children and families. (example: increasing partnerships, mobilizing available resources, etc.)

Council Development and Support

Step Ahead Councils are dependent on adequate procedural and monetary support from the collaborative partners. (example: ongoing recruitment of members, council training, inclusion of consumer representation & input, review of operating procedures or bylaws.)

Economic Opportunities and Education Needs

Indiana families have lifelong learning opportunities, job training opportunities and job opportunities. (example: job availability and training, employee assistance, employment, alternative education, high school graduation rates, etc.)

Educare

Indiana families have access to affordable childcare that provides a safe, healthy environment staffed by qualified personnel who will meet each child's individual needs. (example: expansion of licensed child care providers, training for providers, etc.)

Family Support

Indiana families live in communities that have a comprehensive family-support service system that strengthens families and recognizes parents as a child's first and most important teachers. (example: responsible parenting, early childhood development awareness, adolescent pregnancies, recreation, housing, etc.)

Step Ahead Councils are made up of member volunteers from families and agencies all over the county. The council



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itself does not carry out the actions of a plan, but the members and partnerships developed from being active in the Step Ahead Council.

These volunteers working together to fulfill the objectives of the council the source of actions and then outcomes which make the Step Ahead investment worthwhile.

Although many of the outcomes of Step Ahead Councils are intangible in their measurement, they do conduct activities that result in products pivotal to the continued success of councils.

Historical Perspective

In 1991, all across the State of Indiana, counties embarked upon an initiative to equip children and families with the opportunity to reach their full potential. This initiative, entitled Step Ahead, was part of then Governor Evan Bayh's lifelong learning objectives and focused on early childhood development. The Step Ahead initiative passed the General Assembly with bi-partisan support. ***Step Ahead is not another government program; it is a process to empower families and communities, streamline services, flatten bureaucracies and find creative alternatives to resolve a county's unique challenges.***

Whereas Indiana children and families are the emphasis of Step Ahead, the ninety-two Indiana counties that voluntarily created Step Ahead Councils are its core. These Councils mobilize local communities as well as identify and address local needs. Originally, Step Ahead Councils focused on early childhood development and childcare issues. The focus of Step Ahead, however, is broadening as Councils consider family-centered issues as opposed to just individual-driven issues. Thus, Step Ahead Councils are increasingly moving towards a more holistic approach to the needs of all children and families.

Step Ahead: Chronology of Events

Step Ahead did not happen over night. The road to initiating the Step Ahead process began in 1988 with *Early Childhood and Family Education: Foundations for Success*. The Council of Chief State of School Officers examined issues affecting early childhood development and how early childhood



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development influence children's school performance. This organization called for the creation of new way to support families and assure that each child's earliest years provide the foundation for a creative life.

1989

Esteemed organizations such as The National Governors' Association and the National Association of State Boards of Education identified an emerging national trend in childcare and family issues. Many state service organizations and prevention programs were crisis-oriented and delivering services in a piecemeal fashion through convoluted funding streams. In order to remedy the problem, these organizations were calling for a change in the way government worked with people through better planning, efficient use of resources, and collaborating at the local level.

Sunset Evaluation Committee

The Indiana General Assembly passed a law directing this Committee to analyze human service agencies and agency programs that related to senior citizens, children, and persons with disabilities. The Committee's objective was to identify unnecessary or ineffective agencies or programs, determine the nature of problems, and provide recommendations to the General Assembly. The Committee found that the major problem in human service programs was the fragmentation of services. The Committee recommended that the state implement an integrated public assistance program.

1990

National Conference of State Legislatures noted that Indiana had the most fragmented social service system in the nation. This organization emphasized two themes. First, local authority and control needed to make systems responsive to local needs. Second, decision-makers needed to keep the decision as close to the child/family as possible.

1991

Advent of Step Ahead

The Legislature acted on the Sunset Evaluation Committee's recommendation and established the Family and Social Services Administration (FSSA). The Secretary's Office began functioning on July 1. The consolidation of the three



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Departments into the single Administration took affect January 1, 1992.

Governor Bayh presented to the legislature a component of his lifelong learning in Indiana education program that focuses on early childhood development. The Governor's Initiative became known as the Step Ahead Initiative, which would institute a

comprehensive statewide service integration system. Step Ahead mobilized local service providers, agency representatives, and community leaders to identify and address local needs. The Step Ahead legislation was amended and passed as Senate Bill 405 with bi- partisan support.

A state Step Ahead Office was established within the newly created FSSA.

Fifty-four counties convened with the designation of coordinators and fiscal agents, which entitled these counties to a planning grant.

1992

The Bureau of Child Development is created within the Division of Family and Children in the FSSA. Step Ahead offices were then located in the Bureau of Child Development.

All ninety-two counties formally convened.

Step Ahead provides foundation for the Indiana Collaboration Project. Through partnership, collaboration and planning with legislators and heads of federal agencies, Governor Bayh submitted a plan to President Clinton to collaborate on 199 programs funded by the U.S. Departments of Agriculture, Education, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Justice, and Labor. The Indiana Collaboration Project is the first link from local communities to federal agencies.

The Step Ahead Office is moved from the Bureau of Child Development to Secretary of the Family and Social Services Administration's Office.

Step Ahead Pre-School Pilot Project begins.

1996



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Frank O'Bannon elected Governor.

County by county progress report issued by the Step Ahead office.

1997

The Office of Community Planning is created under the Division of Contract Management. Step Ahead and the Head Start Collaboration Project are moved to the Office of Community Planning.

Governor O'Bannon's Building Bright Beginnings initiative begins. This initiative is inspired by the national, "I am your child campaign." Step Ahead plays an instrumental role in the development of this initiative.

Step Ahead refocuses to redirect initiatives to local planning and less on programs.

1998

Community Capacity Building for people disabilities kicks off. Step Ahead is utilized as the state conduit to help communities plan around initiatives to address areas of growing importance at the local level.

1999

Step Ahead Panel revisits mission of Step Ahead. The current mission statement and key principles are developed.

2000

Step Ahead Councils complete local community capacity plans for people with disabilities. Summary of results are released by the Office of Community Planning during November.



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